DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 206 789 UD 021 665

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TITLE Textbooks as Reinforcers of Sexist Attitudes.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; *Content Analysis; *Content Area Reading; Elementary Secondary Education; Sex Bias; Sex Fairness; *Sex Stereotypes; *Teacher Attitudes; *Textbook Bias; *Textbook Content; *Textbook Selection

ABSTRACT

Students are exposed to a curriculum that primes both males and females for a sexist society. Picture books are the first reading materials to which young children are exposed. An analysis of award winning children's books reveals negative associations about being female. Sex role stereotyping is already operative at the prereading and early reading stages. The next level of books for youngsters is the basal level. Here again, studies of texts reveal sexual stereotyping. The examination of content area textbooks suggests that women neither helped shape the world nor made many contributions to it other than as homemakers. Women, are not adequately represented in the materials to which students are exposed and through which they are socialized. In an effort to improve the status of women in textbooks, several publishers have generated guidelines for writers in regard to representation and language. In addition to these texts, there are various workbooks that help sensitize teachers to their own attitudes as well as to the materials they are using. By becoming aware of sexual stereotyping, educators maximize opportunities for all students. (Author/APM)

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TEXTBOOKS AS REINFORCERS OF SEXIST ATTITUDES

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TEXTBOOKS AS REINFORCERS OF SEXIST ATTITUDES

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In schools we expose students to a curriculum that ostensibly prepares them to take a role in the society upon reaching adulthood. Yet as they move through the curriculum children are exposed to a distorted reality. Both males and females are being primed for a sexist society despite all the feminist activity that may occur outside the schools.

While it is difficult to control the sources of information to which students are exposed outside of the school, some degree of control can be achieved in classrooms, particularly with respect to the materials we use to teach both skills and content. As educators, we serve as one of two most important socializing agents of the child. We, therefore, assume responsibility for presenting each student with as complete a picture of the real world along with his/her chances for successful participation in it.

Sadker (1975) observes that while there are no explicit course offerings on sex role development there exists a "pervasive network of signals" which reinforces sex stereotyping (p.318). Furthermore, there is some evidence that the stereotyping which does occur increases across grade levels if we examine closely the models to which children and youth are presented in their textbooks (Saario, Jacklin & Tittle, 1973). A virtual walk through the grades reveals that there is a gradual "loss of female dignity" that occurs in female students. The following ten points come from Sadker's (1975) careful review of research on sex differences:

- Intellectually, girls start off ahead of boys. They begin speaking, reading and counting sooner...However, during the high school years, a different pattern emerges...

- As boys and girls progress through school, their opinions of boys become higher and correspondingly, their opinions of girls become lower. Children are learning that boys are worth more.

- Grade school boys have positive feelings about being male;...In contrast, girls are not particularly enthusiastic about having been born female...

- By the time they reach upper elementary grades, girls' visions of future occupations are essentially limited to four: teacher, nurse, secretary or mother. Boys of the same age do not view their future occupations potential as so limited.

- ...although more elementary girls are beginning to consider a variety of careers, they are unable to describe in any specificity what having a career would be like. Boys, in contrast, are able to describe in detail... their chosen careers.

- Although women make better grades than do men, they are less likely to believe that they have the ability to do college work.

- Decline in career commitment has been found in girls of high school age. This decline was related to their feelings that male classmates disapproved of a woman's using her intelligence.

- Of the brightest high school students who did not go on to college 75 - 90% are women.

- The majority of male and female college students feel the characteristics associated with masculinity are more valuable and socially desirable than those associated with feminity.

- College women respond negatively to women who achieved high academic or vocational success and at times display an actual motive to avoid success. (p.317)

It is the aim of this paper to examine the influence of textbooks and instructional materials on sex role development. That is, to what degree have instructional materials reinforced the many negative attributes associated with being a female in this culture?

Insofar as reading is valued in this society and with the extremely important emphasis literacy is currently receiving, it seems critical that we examine the content of books, both general and textbooks, in an effort to determine the kinds of subliminal messages students may be receiving.

An examination of the content of the various level books from which students learn, from their first picture books to basals and through content area books and ancillary readings, we find that this medium conveys, in addition to whatever academic or cognitive information present and overt,

all sorts of affective information "regarding the assumptions, values, and biases of a culture...which are traditional and limiting" (McCune & Matthews, 1975, p. 296).

Without further elaboration let us turn to the material. The first books to which young children are exposed prior to and during the first years of school are "picture" books. Sadker (1975) says that these materials may be generating "negative associations" about being female:

> In Caldecott Medal Winners between 1953 and 1971, those select books awarded by the Children's Service Committee by the American Library Association as the most distinguished picture books, there is a ratio of 11 pictures of males for every picture of a female. The ratio of pictures of male to female animals is a staggering 95 to 1. In the sample of Caldecott winners and runners up between 1967 and 1971, only two of the 18 books are stories by girls. Moreover, not one adult woman in the Caldecott sample has a job or profession. Furthermore, there are devastatingly explicit messages about the worthlessness of being female. (p. 319)

The Feminists on Children's Media (1971) looked at children's books and found that of the books on the Child Study Association list many of the categories of books had stories in which males outnumbered females by a ratio of 2 - 1 and higher. In the area of sports <u>all</u> stories were 100% male. Furthermore, of the 49 Newberry Award winners in 1973, stories about males outnumbered those about females by a ratio of 3 - 1. The Feminists on Children's Media have assigned books, by title and author, to categories of "sexist," "cop-outs" (basically modern but with a sexist twist). or "acceptable" in an effort to sensitize those making selections about materials for youngsters to the messages they contain about women.

Thus we see that with children, whether at the pre-reading or early reading stages of non-text materials, are exposed to sex roles via animal characters or real people; a kind of sex role stereotyping is already operative. And if we look to the nature of books (Saario, Jacklin & Tittle,

1973), we have to recognize a dual authority--namely, that in the prereading stages the reader, that is the person decoding the book for the child, usually an adult, adds another authority posture over that of the book itself. Hence, the messages being sent by the configurations on the page the child wants ultimately to be able to decode are being powerfully transmitted by an adult, a figure of authority who must "concur" with the message being transmitted.

The next level of books, the first "official" text for youngsters is the basal, the books from which the child actually undertakes the task of decoding. Thus the content of basals becomes important. Jacklin and her associates (cited in Saario, Jacklin & Tittle, 1973) conducted a study in which they examined the basals of four major publishing companies (Bank Street, Ginn, Harper and Row, and, Scott, Foresman). In their research they paid specific attention to the behaviors, consequences, and environments for each story character. Their findings reveal that the adult males where shown in "significantly higher proportions of conformity behavior and verbal behavior other than statements about themselves" (p. 396). In addition, they found "significant sex differences for every environment category for adults." Men were outdoors or in business while women were "frequently in the home and in the school." In terms of consequences, young females were shown as "recipients of positive consequences coming from a situation" while young males were "recipients of positive consequences from their own action." Thus students are given role models in their texts and the outcomes that these models face clearly indicate to youngsters whether imitation is desirable.

In Zimet's (1970) study, she undertook a content analysis of the primary texts used during six contiguous historical periods in this country from 1600-1966 (I:1600-1776; II:1776-1835; III:1835-1898; IV:1898-1921; V:1921-1940 and, VI:1940-1966). She examined three texts from each period, or a total of eighteen texts, to determine what kind of sex role models were available to students. From this sample she found "a diffuse sex role model was presented in varying degrees from colonial days to the present" (p. 37). The authors of these books increased the number of female characters between 1776-1835, which Zimet points out is the period during which formal education was opened to females. From the texts she sampled she found that from 1898-1966 female

characters outnumbered males but that a "distinct female behavior identity was avoided," perhaps unconsciously so as to "deny the existence of sexuality in children" (p. 38). Zimet then goes on to typify the adult modes representative of each period. In doing so she essentially collapses her categories to three major ones. From 1600-1835, the family is seen as a functional unit. Adult characters predominate the scene as "idealized models of religious and ethical behavior" (p. 38). From 1835-1921, childhood was viewed as a carefree period: "This more affluence America discovered childhood, and with this discovery came the separation of childhood from the adult world" (p. 38). Zimet says that adult characters virtually disappeared and were displaced by children and animals. The absence of adults "suggested that the interest and activities of children were different from those of adults." From 1921-1966, adults reappeared on the scene as "facilitators of their children's wishes, interests, and needs but without distinct interests and needs of their own" (p.39). In summary Zimet writes:

> Thus from this overall review of the presentation of the adult modes in all the books coded for all six periods, it can be seen that a very limited and restricted prototype of sex role behavior has been portrayed. To this extent, the primary text fell far short of fulfilling their role of an acculturation medium. (p. 39)

In drawing a conclusion on the impact of the content in basals and primary texts it is important to consider an ongoing question whether, since the emphasis in the first three grades is on decoding text rather than reading for comprehension, children do or can really attend to the content? It is argued that it is not until fourth grade level reading that stories, in becoming more complex, invite students to shift their focus from decoding to reading for meaning. This notion is based in part on the fact that sight vocabularies are finally at points which facilitate comprehension skills development. Saario, Jacklin, and Tittle (1973) feel that the apparent innocuous content of basals may be more deleterious to positive role development than is realized.

In examining content area textbooks, and shifting from fiction to factual data can we as concerned educators become more relaxed about the presentation of

information, especially sex role models? DeCrow's study (1972) of social studies textbooks from ten publishers failed to find women working outside the homes with the exception of the most traditional roles--e.g., teachers and nurses. Moreover, working women were addressed as "Miss," which sends young girls the message that choosing a career may prevent marriage. DeCrow also notes that men are usually cast as the decision makers. Hence, not only are women subject to fewer roles but in them are less competent.

Trecker (1971) examined the role of women in high school textbooks only to find that their treatment in the recording of U.S. history "reflects the attitudes and prejudices of the society":

> Male activities in our society are considered the most important, therefore, male activities are given primacy in the texts. There is a definite image of women in our society, and women in history who conform to this image are apt to be included. (p. 260)

In keeping with the above systems of inclusion/exclusion in or from the twelve texts examined, Trecker found that it was customary to use males as spokesmen for the various historical movements. She recognizes that some of the problem is masked by the use of the pronoun "he," but that writers are still guilty of omitting many important women in their recording history. In a rather poignant statement Trecker reduces female representation in history as follows:

> Based on information in these commonly used high school texts, one might summarize the history and contributions of the American woman as follows. Women arrived in 1619...They held Seneca Falls Convention on Women's Rights in 1848. During the rest of the Nineteenth Century they participated in reform movements, chiefly temperance, and were exploited in factories. In 1923, they were given the vote. They joined the armed forces for the first time during the Second World War and thereafter have enjoyed the good life in America. Add the names of the women who are invariably mentioned: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Jane Addams, Dorothea Dix, and Frances Perkins, with perhaps Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and , almost as frequently Carry Nation, and you have the basix "text." (Trecker, p. 252)

Overall findings of the content analyses, then, suggest that the picture of reality portrayed in early texts does not reflect realities which are consonant with those experienced by most readers, particularly urban readers. Specifically, the idealized reader's view of society frequently suggests that there are (1) no urban children, (2) no ghetto children, (3) no working mothers, and (4) no divorced parents.

As we move to content area texts we then draw the conclusion that women neither helped to shape our world nor made very many significant contributions to it other than as homemakers.

Some consequences of this kind of message may be that: (1) in an active sense children will seek to perpetuate the stereotypes, (2) in a more passive way they may simply not choose to explore unsuggested roles for themselves; or, (3) perhaps devastatingly so, but not so measurably, children may come to feel inadequate about the dissonance between the projected images and themselves, their families, communities, and so on. While all textbooks are not accounted for in this review the picture is basically clear: women are sorely under-represented in the materials to which students are exposed and through which they become socialized. Can anything be done to alter this situation? The Feminists on Children's Media (1971) identify that what is needed are books that present women in "flexible, diverse roles." They feel that it is "illusory and ineffective to invest energy in opening up opportunities for women...when children are still being shaped by insidious sexist influences which is only barely examined" (p. 22).

In an effort to improve the status of women in textbooks several publishers have generated guidelines for writers to conform to regarding representation and language:

- Macmillan (1976), in its "Guidelines for Creating Positive Sexual and Racial Images in Educational Materials," has identified several infractions for which are offered "guideposts," or approaches for correcting the errors in

future material. Some of the categories include "The Invisible Women," "The 51% Minority," "Woman on a Pedestal/Man the Survivor," "The Cheerleader Syndrome," "The Perfect Family." Included is a list of words and phrases to "try to avoid" along with suggested alternatives.

- Scott, Foresman and Company (1972) recognizes that "Textbooks are sexist if they omit the actions and achievements of women, if they demean women by using patronizing language, or if they show women only in stereotyped roles with less than the full range of human interests, traits, and capabilities" (p. 1). Again, recommendations for anti-sexist language are included.

- McGraw-Hill's president, in his introduction to their guide (Guidelines for Equal Treatment of the Sexes in McGraw-HillBook Company Publications"), says that the guidelines are neither rigid nor mandatory, "nor intended to apply to creative literature" (p. 1). What they encourage in educational materials, reference works, and nonfiction works is the avoidance of stereotypes in depicting roles of men and women. These include (1) job stereotypes, (2) life styles (marital status, home maintenance) and (3) career options. In addition they suggest that human strengths and weaknesses should be portrayed but not in terms of male or female strengths and weaknesses.

- SRA publishes a similar kind of "guidelines" manual. Of note here is the following statement:

> When there are special situations in which accuracy makes an equal distribution of the sexes inappropriate, explorations of the limiting circumstances should appear prominently. (p. 5)

SRA maintains that each book published should reflect accurate percentages and "separately meet the criteria of equal sex distribution and fair representation" (p. 5). Whenever traditional women are portrayed, an equal number of non-traditional portrayals is encouraged. In addition to their guidelines, SRA provides a number of reprints of articles related to sex and gender research. The border under which articles are written reads as follows: "SRA Helps you

Handle Stereotyping." They serve the added purpose of helping the classroom teacher identify the potential areas of concern.

- Holt, Rinehart and Winston has prepared guidelines which deal directly with the treatment of role models. In these guidelines are delineated ways in which both sexes should be portrayed in terms of dress, employment, domestic life, marital status, emotional expression, hobbies and sports, and in the portrayal of children. These publishers make the following commitment:

> A balance is to be maintained in the use of role models in exercises, examples, all text materials not controlled by outside copyright, and both researched and commissioned materials. (p. 3)

In addition to the "guidelines" literature there are various workbooks that help sensitize teachers to their own attitudes as well as to the materials they are using. One such source is Beyond Sex Roles by Alice G. Sargent (1974). This book examines the "masks, roles, obligations, expectations, rules, and stereotypes" that accompany either sex. The book is designed so that the reader can explore his or her own beliefs as well as to distinguish between tnose differences that are biological as opposed to those that are fostered environmentally.

What is most important in all of these considerations is that our attitudes change on the basis of what and how we present materials to students. Should we continue to use biased materials because of school policy and/or economics we must be committed to correcting the inaccuracies presented. If fortunate enough to be in a position to order books, including library materials (reference books, dictionaries, periodicals, fiction and non-fiction books), which we provide for students enabling them to learn independently, then we must select those that truly present positive images of women.

Saario, Jacklin and Tittle (1973) hold that we should "maximize individual development and self-esteem by displaying a wide range of models and model activities" for all students (p.399). Howard and Graton (1975) aptly perceive the educators task in the following statement:

> We urge educators, male and female, to commit themselves to the basic goal of maximizing the opportunities for all human beings to develop to the fullest extent possible their own unique capabilities, interests, and predispositions in education is to accomplish in positive ways its principal task - the intellectual, moral, and emotional growth of children. Sex role stereotyping is antithetical to humanistic education, for it denies the value of individual difference and personal growth by prejudicing and molding students on the basis of sex.

The degree to which the above is achieved through the selection of materials that we provide to our students demands that we enter that process as more informed individuals. Should this mean pushing aside one's own attitudes and beliefs for the sake of his/her students full growth and development then the imperative is clear: Supplant texts with traditional portrayals wherever possible; at other times augment texts with information and discussion to guarantee that students bring information learned from textbooks into line with reality.

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